

Tom sawyer versus huckleberry finn

Literature, American Literature



In the novel *Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, Mark Twain portrays the eponymous protagonist as a clever boy who can easily con people. By contrast, the eponymous hero of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is an emotionally driven character who follows his inner sense of morality. Mark Twain reintroduces the character of Tom Sawyer in *Huckleberry Finn* to act as a foil to Huck, and show the importance of thinking with one's heart as well as one's head.

Huck, the protagonist of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is established as an emotional, morality driven character. Huck follows his heart, even when it goes against what he has always been taught. Tom Sawyer appears near the end of the novel, and embodies the opposite traits. Tom is clever and bookish, and his actions are not influenced by morality at all. Clearly the two are meant to act as foils. The importance lies in what juxtaposing the two is meant to accomplish. Twain juxtaposes Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn to emphasize that thinking with one's heart is at least as important as thinking with one's head.

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn follows the story of Huck as he travels down the Mississippi River. From the beginning Huck is driven primarily by emotion. In the very first chapter, Huck mentions that the Widow Douglas took him in and attempted to "sivilise" him (Twain 32). The misspelling on Huck's part indicated that he rejected civilization and the formal education that comes with it. The action of the story begins because Huck decides to run away from his abusive father based on a primal desire to get away from danger, but without forethought about how best to do that (Twain 58).

Huck's emotional character pays no mind to the danger of sailing down the river, and just does what he feels is best.

Huck also follows his instincts when it comes to morality. Huck makes decisions based on what he believes to be right even when the rules of society wouldn't agree, best shown when he decides to help Jim. The most important issue of the novel is the perceived morality of slavery. Jim, Huck's black friend, is a runaway slave, and, according to the law, should be captured and returned. Huck's decision is whether to follow what society and the law say, or to follow his own sense that slavery is inherently wrong. At this point, Jim has been captured, and will imminently be sold unless someone can rescue him (Twain 202). Since Huck is Jim's only true friend, that someone must be Huck. The facts laid out before Huck say that he should leave Jim where he is; the law says that an escaped slave should be captured and imprisoned, and it is wrong to help him. Even more importantly, Christianity, as it was taught in slaveholding regions, would forbid freeing Jim in this situation, and religion would commonly be identified synonymously with what is morally correct. In one of the most powerful scenes in the book, Huck wonders if God is going to send him to Hell for helping a black man. Huck decides that, if this is true, then "All right then, I'll go to Hell!" (Twain 202). This passage is especially important because it proves that Huck's feelings and his sense of morality are entwined. A sense of morality could be derived from what society says is right, but Huck only cares that Jim is his friend. Huck's sense of right and wrong comes from what he feels.

Huck's conviction in doing what is right is demonstrated when he directly works to solve Jim's problem. Jim has been captured as a runaway slave, and is currently being held in a shed as a prisoner until he can be returned to his

owner. Huck's plan to rescue Jim involves no thoughts of adventure or fun or personal glory (Twain 217). The only priority is getting Jim out of danger, proving Huck's heartfelt, selfless intentions. It is made obvious to the reader that the plan would have worked perfectly. So, following the plan of the emotionally driven character would have led to a happy ending for the people involved. Then, Tom Sawyer appears and proposes a different plan. By following Tom's plan, life is worse for everyone involved than if they had listened to Huck's straightforward plan.

When Tom Sawyer appears in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, he is already a known quantity. Huck has mentioned him several times throughout the book but, more importantly, the audience would have known him from the earlier book, *Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. In it, Tom proves both his cleverness and his unscrupulous nature, most famously through convincing people to paint a fence for him. So, when he shows up in this book, the audience will expect his actions to include various crafty tricks. Judith Fetterly argues that "The desire for glory, the desire to be recognized as inordinately clever, is nothing new to Tom" (Fetterly 72). His brains, and the desire to have people appreciate his intelligence, are the primary motivating force for Tom. Significantly, Tom's intelligence comes at least in part from books. When his plans are questioned, he replies "Why, hain't you ever read any books at all?" (Twain 222). Here, Tom aligns himself with the bookish intelligence of society, rather than some natural cunning. In addition to being a character, Tom can be seen as a symbol of intelligence and rational thought.

When Tom arrives in the story, he immediately begins acting as a schemer. His most important plot is helping Jim escape. While Huck's initial plan would have been successful, Tom is too obsessed with style and glory to care about freeing Jim (Twain 218). At every step of the plan, Tom makes life more difficult for everyone, solely because that's what his books made him think was the proper way to do things. For example, Tom decides that Jim must be dug out of the shed with knives (226), write a journal, despite being illiterate (224), and tame dangerous wild animals (240). Tom gets many of his ideas from stories, such as when, in relation to writing a message in Jim's own blood, he says " The Iron Mask always done that, and it's a blame' good way, too" (224). None of these things will help Jim reach his goal of freedom. In fact, Jim actively dislikes the business with the snakes and spiders, but Tom ignores him. Tom is so distracted by what books tell him is the proper way to do things that he ignores the human needs of Jim, displaying how his cleverness gives rise to a complete lack of emotional intelligence.

Tom's lack of morals is especially evident in how he sees himself. Tom is so obsessed with glory and adventure, that he has his own twisted set of morals to rigidly follow. When the decision is made to dig Jim out of the shed with picks, because knives are taking too long, he remarks that " It ain't right, and it ain't moral...but there's only the one way" (Twain 228). Given the end goal of freeing Jim, using picks is the correct thing to do, as it will be faster and more likely to succeed; however, Tom has such strong illusions of grandeur that he values a difficult escape more highly than actually helping someone. His learning from books has left Tom with a twisted, unreasonable

sense of morality that is on a totally different axis from what would normally be considered moral.

While Tom is definitely deluded, he is not an immoral character. Even when his actions make Jim uncomfortable, there is no sadism in Tom. James Cox argues that Tom does what he does solely for the sake of adventure (Cox 310). Tom's book learning has not lead him to be evil; rather it has lead to him being disinterested with morality. Even when he ignores the fact that he is hurting Jim's chances of freedom, Tom is still trying to get Jim free eventually. Tom's cleverness leads to him being amoral, not immoral.

Twain believed that learning in schools is not the same as education, and perhaps even that schooling can get in the way of real education. He once wrote: " I never let my schooling interfere with my education" (QuoteDB). The problem with formal schooling is most evident in the character of Tom, who gets all of his ideas from books, and so represents the artificial learning of society.

Another time Twain has talked about intelligence was when he said " The fact that man knows right from wrong proves his intellectual superiority over other creatures; but the fact that he can do wrong proves his moral inferiority to any creature that cannot" (QuoteDB). Twain cares about humans knowing right from wrong, and believes that the thinking that humans do can lead them away from doing what is right. This quote is especially interesting when applied to Huck. When Huck decides to free his friend, he actively chooses to do something that he has always been taught

is wrong. Huck represents following an inner sense of morality, despite whatever intelligent society might say to the contrary.

Some critics have argued that Tom's appearance at the end of the novel undermines the message of the book. Critic Leo Marx remarked that "The ending of Huckleberry Finn makes so many readers uneasy because they rightly sense that it jeopardizes the significance of the entire novel" (Marx 292). He feels that Tom's amoral character works directly against the point made by Huck.

Marx's belief is misguided. Rather than undermining the significance of Huck in the story, Tom actually emphasizes it. As Janeczko and Matthews mention in their essay on the literary significance of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, "Mark Twain brought back Tom at the end of the novel to serve as a foil for Huck; [the readers] saw Huck's growth and sensitivity to human beings, including Jim, in contrast to Tom's romantic predictability" (Janeczko and Matthews 42). Without Tom acting as foil, it would not be as obvious to the audience how kindhearted and morally intelligent is to Tom.

Twain puts forth these two opposing forces in order to show the importance of Huck's way of making decisions. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was written after the Civil War had ended, so slavery had been abolished for a significant length of time. When Huck acts to free Jim, the audience knows that Huck has made the morally correct decision, even if Huck does not. Huck can easily be seen as the morally correct character.

The conflict between the social and emotional foundations of morality is present throughout the novel. In chapter 18, Huck gets caught in the conflict between the Grangerfords and the Shepherdsons. Here, the feud represents the twisted morality of civilized society. The two families are desperately trying to kill each other, but even those participating in it do not really remember why (Twain 144). The families only continue the conflict because someone older than them told them to, as Buck shows when he says “ Oh, yes, Pa knows [who started the feud] I reckon” (Twain 144). The contrast between this social morality and emotional morality is shown in the love affair between Miss Sophia and Harney. The two young lovers do not care about feud, and only want to be together. Love is obviously an emotional decision making tool, and so the two are separate from the rest of their families in how they make their decisions. At this point, Huck has not yet decided to follow his heart over social rules, and the book shows this in his indecision. Huck states “ I judged I ought to told her father about that paper and the curious way she acted” (Twain 153). By not telling Mr. Grangerford about Miss Sophia, Huck has, at least temporarily, sided with emotional decision making, but his regrets show that he is still not certain of his side in the conflict.

The importance of the contrast with Tom is in showing what part of Huck leads to making these correct decisions. Without Tom, Huck’s goodness could be attributed to his youth, or his willingness to break stupid laws, or his independent attitude. It is only by bringing Tom on stage that we can see Huck’s emotional morality leading to good decisions. Tom shares all the other traits, but is an intellect driven amoral character.

The contrast between emotional and intellectual morality is especially evident in how things go bad when Tom starts making decisions. Huck's plan to free Jim would have been successful, had not Tom started making things more difficult. This is Twain's way of forcing the reader to see that deviating from the emotional decisions causes a catastrophe.

Still, Twain is careful not to go too far. He does not want to insinuate that all intelligent thought should be ignored. We can see this in Huck's reaction to Tom's foolish plan. Huck states that "I see in a minute that is was worth fifteen of mine, for style... and maybe get us all killed besides" (Twain 218). Even a modicum of rational thought would lead to a protest of this suicidal plan, but Huck merely accedes. Here, Huck makes the emotional choice of going along with whatever his trusted friend Tom wants to do, without considering the consequences. In a reversal of previous ideas, Twain seems to argue that not all decisions can be made purely with emotion.

Twain's purpose in using Tom, then, is to show that emotions are at least as important as rational thought. Most of the book is spent building up the importance of emotional decision making because that side was the underdog. As Cox mentions, even Huck comes to the decision to help free Jim reluctantly (Cox 309). It is hard to go against all of society in making one's decisions, so Twain had to spend much more time in establishing that as a good thing to do. Siding with rational thought and the ideals of civilized society is easy, so Twain only needed one event to showcase the possible danger of only making emotional decisions. By showing flaws in both decision making methods, Twain emphasizes that neither works on their

own. Rather, human beings need to make decisions both with their heads and their hearts to do what is right.